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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: (ii) women's human rights and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

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The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Prevention strategies to combat trafficking of women

Trafficking is defined as the moving of people away from their normal environment in order to exploit them. The overwhelming majority of trafficked persons are girls/women. Most of the time, they are recruited for sexual exploitation in systems of prostitution. Trafficking violates the fundamental human rights of

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persons. Members of our non-governmental organizations (NGOs) want to see an end to this exploitative and abusive treatment of women.

Facts to consider

1. Trafficking of women and girls for the purpose of prostitution is one of the fastest growing areas of international criminal activity. Over 1,200,000 persons (the number may be as high as 4 million), especially women and children, are trafficked each year across international borders (Communication made by Carol Smolenski, ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking in Children), New York, 3 October 2002).

2. Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights prohibits all forms of slavery.

3. The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, through its supplementary Protocol, deals especially with preventing, suppressing and punishing trafficking in persons, especially women and children. Unfortunately, some States seem to lack the political will to implement this protocol effectively. Commenting on the resolution against trafficking adopted by the General Assembly in December 2000, the Secretary-General of the United Nations recommends that further actions be taken for the adoption and enforcement of legal strategies.

4. Article 6 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women obligates all States to take all measures, including legislation, to suppress the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation. The measures taken by various Governments are insufficient to curb this criminal activity. It is estimated that as many as 300,000 Bangladeshi children have been trafficked to brothels in India (UNICEF, 2001, "A Reference Kit on Violence Against Women and Girls in South Asia", p. 27).

Positive initiatives

- Many Governments have passed Acts for the prevention and suppression of the trafficking in women and children. In Thailand, for example, girls are now protected under the purview of the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Women and Children Act, 1996.

- Several NGOs have set up programmes to rescue, repatriate and reintegrate the victims of trafficking. Examples of these include Maiti Nepal in Nepal, Sanlaap in Calcutta, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Thailand, and others.

Effective strategies to combat trafficking

To be successful, strategies to combat trafficking of women must:

- **Address gender inequality as the root cause of violence and trafficking.** Persistent and pervasive societal discrimination against women is the cause of their lack of access and control over economic, social and political resources. Women are discriminated against in the areas of education, employment, equitable pay during gainful work, equal representation, access to information, decision-making positions, etc.

- **Use new approaches that rely on more comprehensive and inclusive networks and partnerships.** Government is a key player in any prevention

strategy. More attention should be given to the inclusion of NGOs and of initiatives from local communities when these have involved the participation of local leaders.

1. Suggestions for achievable community-level programmes that will prevent trafficking

Based on our knowledge and field experience as NGOs, we wish to offer suggestions on how projects involving local communities could become an effective component of the fight against trafficking.

In trafficking-prone areas, community-level prevention programmes could be organized for the purpose of detecting and preventing the early disappearance of girls. The coordination and organizational responsibilities could be taken on by reputable and dedicated NGOs. Such programmes could have the following components:

- A vigilance committee functioning at the village level to target trafficking agents. Such committees would be comprised of the village/community headperson/mayor, local women and men volunteers (young as well as more experienced persons), the local police, local religious leader, etc.
- A local registry system where the names of missing girls are reported, along with all pertinent details.
- An investigation team whose responsibility would be to screen "job recruiters" or other newcomers entering the village to detect if they might be recruiters for prostitution. The job recruiters would be asked to provide the girl's future employer's name, address and telephone number. He would be asked to give references on the potential employer, which the investigation team would countercheck.
- The vigilance committee would follow-up on the girl's living and working conditions (carpet factory, domestic work, etc.)
- Girls groups could be formed, whenever possible, for the purpose of building their confidence and self-esteem and to give them a better understanding of the various forms of gender violence.
- Poverty eradication measures should be organized at the village level: literacy programme, training for small-scale enterprises, etc.
- Media strategies should be developed to denounce culturally upheld beliefs and practices of violence against women, including domestic violence, female genital mutilation, female foeticide and systems of prostitution.
- Community education and advocacy programmes should be designed for and directed to both genders in the community. These could cover issues such as gender discrimination, violence against women, the dangers of HIV/AIDS, the value of women and their resourcefulness for the community.
- Special recognition awards could be given by regional authorities to model villages/communities which have an active and effective anti-violence project.

2. Early systemic alerts

Rescued girls have stated how they would have appreciated an early intervention by the police and NGOs at the place where they were sold or forced into prostitution. Existing networks between the pimps, brothel owners and the police needs to be dealt with for successful rescue operations. There is an urgent need to establish/strengthen mechanisms for cooperation between the source, transit and destination countries or states where women are trafficked. To be more specific, this should include:

- Effective vigilance at border crossings
- Strict checking of identification papers
- Greater cooperation between the supplying and host countries for the purpose of prevention and rescue
- Anti-corruption initiatives
- Prosecution of sex tourism and of "mail bride" industries.